

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002882

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [ASEC](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIANS WORRY CONCESSIONS TO ISRAEL PAVE WAY  
FOR MORE VIOLENCE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (b)(d)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1. (C) Jordanian commentators and contacts almost uniformly criticized President Bush's remarks on April 14 endorsing Israel's plan to withdraw from Gaza, seeing his statements about Palestinians' right of return and Israeli settlements as an inappropriate attempt to prejudge final status issues. Several contacts said the U.S. statements overshadowed the positive news of an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Commentators and contacts deplored the perceived inattention to Arab leaders' input and the timing of the announcement, just days before King Abdullah's meeting with President Bush. To many, the U.S. concessions to Sharon presented another embarrassing predicament before the King, who will be hard pressed to highlight the positive aspects of the plan to an angry and disillusioned public. Prince Faisal and the Foreign Minister (septel), however, are clearly focused on putting the statements in the best possible light. There is no evidence of public protest, but contacts expect some protests after Friday prayers April 16. End Summary.

-----  
BUSH HAS "NO RIGHT" TO PREJUDGE FINAL STATUS ISSUES  
-----

2. (C) There was local criticism of President Bush's announcement on April 14 endorsing Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan, which was seen as prejudging final status issues, particularly the Palestinians' right of return. Many decried the perceived policy shift on settlements, charging that sanctioning Israel's retention of settlements in the West Bank contravenes international law, previous UN resolutions, and long-standing U.S. policy. Karak Member of Parliament Atef Tarawni told Poloff that President Bush does not have the right to "cancel" Palestinians' right to return to their original home in present-day Israel.

3. (C) Jordan University professor Mohammad Khair Mustafa said the potential good news about Israel's withdrawal from Gaza was obscured by the President's decision to stake out a new public position on final status issues at a time when anti-Israeli and anti-U.S. sentiment in the region is at an all-time high. Head of Dar al-Jalil Publishing House Ghazi Saadi termed President Bush's speech as "very painful," particularly with regard to settlements. He worried that the U.S. agreement to allow Israeli settlements to remain in the West Bank will significantly reduce the available land to which Palestinian refugees can feasibly return. "How can we accommodate those Palestinians who want to return if we have no land?" he asked rhetorically. He said the President should have defined under what conditions the "temporary" wall could come down, and offered guarantees to the Palestinians in this regard.

-----  
JORDANIANS FEAR DOOR OPEN FOR MORE VIOLENCE  
-----

4. (C) Many contacts recognize that any final agreement probably would mirror the terms the President defined. At the same time, they worry that the U.S. assurances to Israel will embolden Sharon to continue heavy handed tactics against Palestinians. Specifically, some say that U.S. sanctioning of Israel's "right to defend itself," and only requiring Israel to remove "certain military installations" in Gaza, has left the door open for more targeted killings, ongoing destruction of Palestinian homes and property, and other collective punishment measures against Palestinians that will only intensify the cycle of violence, not improve chances for peace.

-----  
ANOTHER SLIGHT TO JORDAN  
-----

5. (C) During a meeting to discuss other issues, Prince Faisal expressed to the Defense Attach his disappointment at what he considered concessions to Sharon, yet voiced hope that the vague wording might present the opportunity for "reinterpretation" more favorable to the Palestinian point of

view. Several contacts criticized the way the U.S. and Israel appeared to hammer out the terms while seeming to ignore requests from Arab leaders -- including King Abdullah -- not to concede to Israel's demand for assurances on final status issues.

16. (C) Former MP Hamadeh Faraneh told Poloff that the timing of the announcement, just before King Abdullah's meeting in Washington with President Bush, was unfortunate, particularly because many now believe that the U.S. ignored Jordanian concerns about Sharon's request for U.S. assurances on the right of return and border demarcation. Faraneh compared the King's dilemma with the embarrassment the King experienced when Israel killed Sheikh Yassin just days after the King met Sharon in Israel. He predicted the King will be hard pressed to show a frustrated and angry public something positive from his meeting with President Bush. This point was captured in Amman's morning papers which featured banner headlines critical of the President's "concessions" to PM Sharon, juxtaposed with the Palace's announcement of the King's impending arrival in Washington.

17. (C) The perceived U.S. rejection of Arab views reinforces ordinary people's belief that the U.S. is intent on imposing its will on the region, according to Director of International Relations at Philadelphia University Dr. Ibrahim Badran. The U.S. "go-it-alone" approach enhances popular perception that the U.S. has no interest in working with its regional supporters to ensure enduring solutions to the region's problems, according to Al-Quds Research Center Director and journalist Oreib al-Rintawi. Dr. Badran, a long-time contact and former negotiator with Israel, told Poloff that friends of the U.S. in Jordan -- himself included -- find it increasingly difficult to defend U.S. policies in the region. He said academics like himself were the last bastion of reason among a population that is frustrated and angry with U.S. heavy-handed tactics in Iraq and the perceived unwavering bias for Israel.

-----  
FRIDAY PROTESTS  
-----

18. (C) There is no sign of public protest in Jordan, but Friday prayers on April 16 are likely to provoke some expression of anger, especially among the Palestinian refugee population. UNRWA officials expect protests Friday afternoon, but have found refugees to be depressed, rather than angry, about President Bush's statements about right of return and Israeli "population centers" in the West Bank. RSO contacts believe that if protests occur, they will not be as virulent as Jordan experienced after Sheikh Yassin's assassination.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

19. (C) In Jordan, the good news of an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and some West Bank settlements has been drowned out by disappointment at the nearly universal perception that the U.S. has changed its position on final status issues to the disadvantage of Arabs. Attempts to explain the strategic opportunity of Sharon's disengagement plan and the nuances of the President's remarks, including on final status issues, tend to be dismissed as "sugar coating" a poison pill.

Visit Embassy Amman's classified web site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman> or access the site  
through the State Department's SIPRNET home page.  
HALE